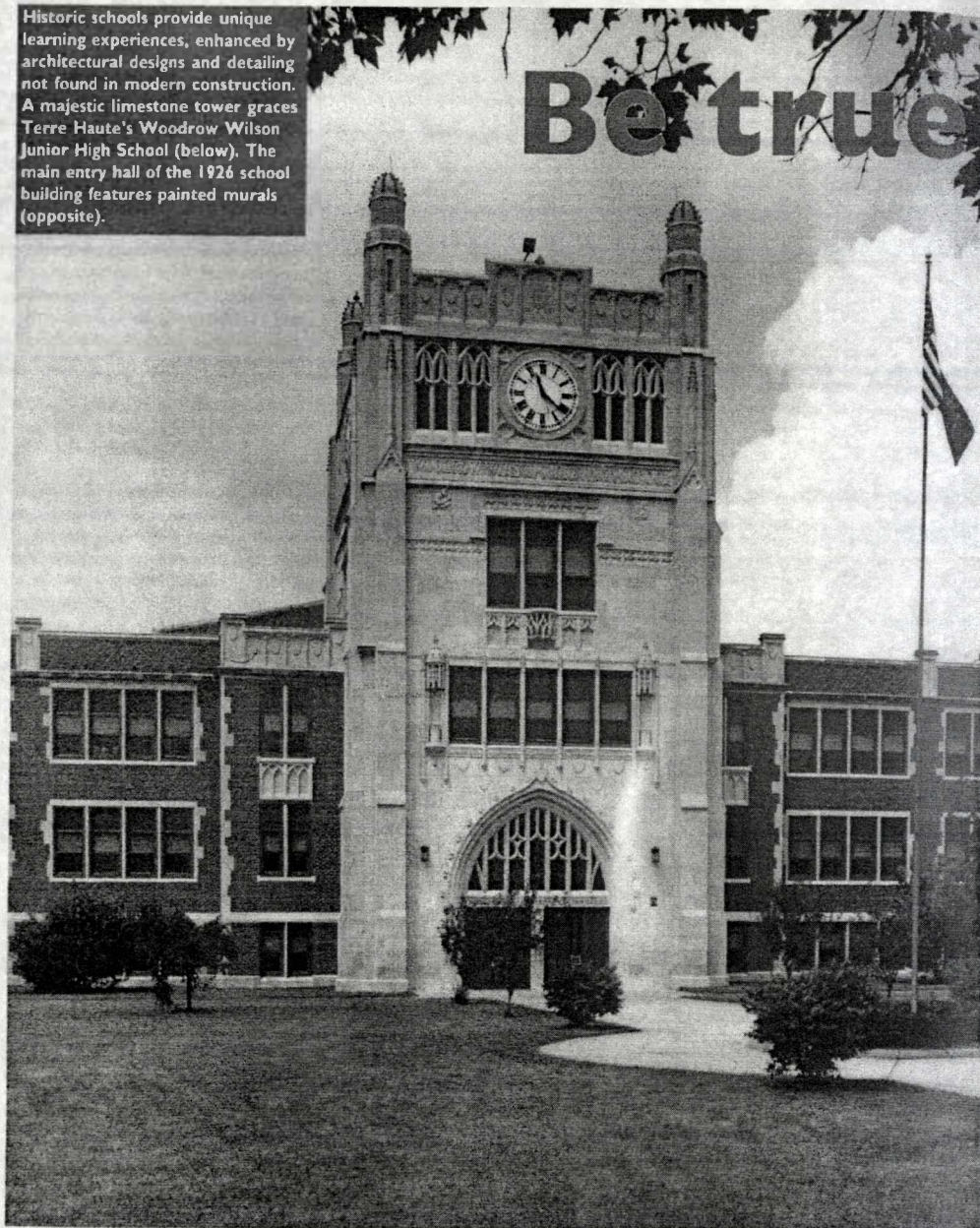


Historic schools provide unique learning experiences, enhanced by architectural designs and detailing not found in modern construction. A majestic limestone tower graces Terre Haute's Woodrow Wilson Junior High School (below). The main entry hall of the 1926 school building features painted murals (opposite).



FEATURE TOPIC

Be true to your school

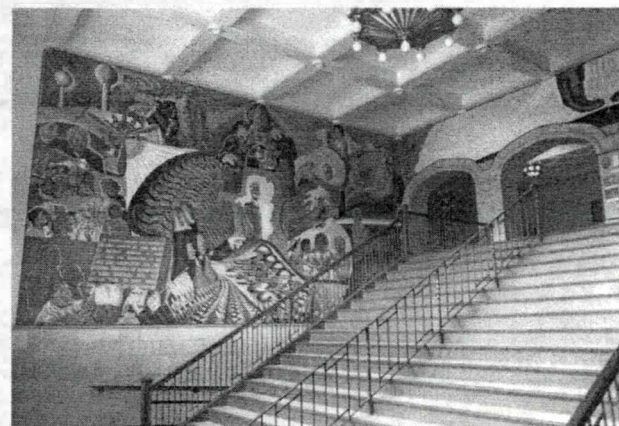
When some loud braggart
tries to put me down
And says his school is great
I tell him right away
"Now what's the matter buddy
Ain't you heard of my school?
It's number one in the state
So be true to your school!"

—The Beach Boys

Imagine being in elementary school and entering the front door of a tall historic school made of bricks and limestone, through a fancy, carved and arched opening that dwarfs your small self. The foot-worn steps and hallways and the wide sills of the immense windows evidence the students upon students who've been here before you.

OK, now imagine entering a low-slung new school, through one in a long, flat bank of metal and glass doors similar to those at Wal-Mart, into a generic, featureless maze of cinder block walls and fluorescent lights.

Which school is it easier to be true to? Which school says more clearly in its scale, shape and ornament that education is solid and important, inspiring and broadening? Which place readily imbues a sense of connection with the community, with people and events in the chain of history?



Artist Gilbert Wilson portrayed the social, industrial and individual factors at work in Depression-era America in his murals for Woodrow Wilson Junior High. School children raised the money to pay for the artwork, which the artist hoped would "encourage students to think for themselves, and always search for the answers that elude them."

We think the answer is obvious. Yet, as modern trends in education promote the construction of sprawling mega-schools, the number of historic school buildings is dwindling.

Historic school buildings present preservation opportunities that are only beginning to be explored. Several Indiana school districts have made commitments to update and, when necessary, enlarge old schools—a bold stance Historic Landmarks Foundation applauds and works to promote. Others have created new uses for vacated historic schools. Although it's not our favorite solution, adaptive use is certainly better than the destructive alternatives, as it preserves these venerable, meaningful and architecturally distinguished landmarks.